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Alabama's top lawyer shares his grief about wife's suicide

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — In an emotional appearance, Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall opened up to reporters Wednesday about his wife's weekend suicide, saying she was a beautiful and gentle person who had a long struggle with depression, anxiety and chronic pain.



With his adult daughter and other family members standing behind him during a press conference at a northern Alabama church, Marshall sobbed at times as he described Bridgette Marshall's life and deeply personal struggles.

"It's tough. It's tough," Marshall said as he began, thanking people for an outpouring of support and criticizing what he called an instance of reckless reporting that he said exposed details of her death Sunday. He spoke in his hometown, Albertville, about 165 miles (266 kilometers) north of Montgomery, the state capital.

Marshall said he felt compelled to come forward to stop “half-truths” about her death. Family members also hoped sharing her story would help other families and individuals, who have been touched by mental health issues and suicide, to know that they are not alone, he said.

“It is our hope today to share our story to also give strength to those families who have endured what we have endured. And maybe for that person who felt like Bridgette did on Sunday morning to know that there is hope and there are people who love them.”

Marshall said his wife suffered major depressive disorder and anxiety. “Being married to me probably didn’t help because it caused someone who was anxious to also sometimes be in the public eye and that is not where she wanted to be,” Marshall said.

He also said mental illness is “not a sign of weakness, let’s make that clear. Nobody wants to be mentally ill.”

He described someone at times uncomfortable with the limelight and the pressure of politics. She feared that her past personal struggles would be exposed.

She also had illnesses that caused physical pain, including a digestive disorder that required a feeding tube, and had been plagued with painful migraines since childhood. The migraines led to bouts of opioid dependence after she was prescribed powerful painkillers as a treatment.

Despite all that, Marshall said his wife urged him to seek the position of attorney general ahead of his appointment last year and to run in this year’s election.

She recently had moved to Tennessee instead of living in Montgomery.

Marshall said he believed things were looking up when she came home for the June 5 primary election and her birthday celebration the next day. “We saw happiness in her that we hadn’t seen in a while, and it was good. It was good. And then

for whatever reason something changed and we don't know what," Marshall said.

Marshall described their final phone call. "She said, 'I'm tired of being tired and I just want to go.'"

"I told her how she was loved. As a guy who professionally is supposed to convince people with words to do something, I couldn't reach her," Marshall said sobbing.

He said he remains haunted by that final conversation and whether she would still be alive if he hadn't become attorney general.

Marshall asked for his daughter's privacy, saying they needed time to mourn and to remember Bridgette Marshall's life. He said his wife, who volunteered at a hospice, had touched the lives of countless members of their community, and he read a loving note she had written for him two weeks before her death.

"That is the woman I will celebrate ... Please allow us to celebrate that life and to no longer have to discuss her death," Marshall said.

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